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WOMEN'S TALENT CORPS. PROGRESS REPORT, MARCH-APRIL, 1967.

WOMENS TALENT CORPS, NEW YORK, N.Y.

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THE WOMEN'S TALENT CORPS WAS FOUNDED IN 1965 ON TWO PREMISES--(1) MATURE WOMEN LIVING IN POVERTY AREAS OF NEW YORK COULD BE TRAINED TO PROVIDE SERVICES TO THE COMMUNITY REGARDLESS OF THEIR PREVIOUS EDUCATION AND (2) COMMUNITY AGENCIES WOULD CREATE SEMI-PROFESSIONAL SERVICE POSITIONS WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT. BY APRIL 1967, 120 TRAINEES HAD BEEN PLACED AS TEACHER AND GUIDANCE ASSISTANTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AS SOCIAL WORK AND THERAPY ASSISTANTS IN HOSPITALS AND NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS, AND AS PROGRAM WORKERS. A SERIES OF COMMUNITY MEETINGS IN LOW INCOME AREAS IDENTIFIED LOCAL NEEDS AND THE ROLE WOMEN PICTURED FOR THEMSELVES. A LETTER-WRITING CAMPAIGN ENLISTED POLITICAL SUPPORT AND FUNDS FROM THE OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY. APPLICANTS WERE TESTED AND INTERVIEWED TO REVEAL THEIR PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS, SENSITIVITY TO HUMAN RELATIONS, AND HIGH MORALE, QUALITIES CLOSELY CORRELATED WITH SUCCESS. THROUGHOUT THE 30-WEEK TRAINING PROGRAM FORMAL CLASSES WERE INTERWOVEN WITH FIELD EXPERIENCE, WITH AN EXPERIENCED PROFESSIONAL WOMAN, CALLED A COORDINATOR-TRAINER, ACTING AS DISCUSSION LEADER, COUNSELOR, AND SUPERVISOR TO EACH SMALL GROUP OF TRAINEES. OUT OF THE TRAINING INSTITUTE HAS DEVELOPED A "NEW CAREERS" COLLEGE FOR HUMAN SERVICES WITH A MODIFIED, TWO-YEAR CURRICULUM. (AJ)

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Report No. 6

PROGRESS REPORT

March - April, 1967

WOMEN'S TALENT CORPS

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INTRODUCTION

The March-April report of the Women's Talent Corps will be devoted to a review of the major accomplishments of the organization during its first year of operation, with emphasis on the strategy used to bring about institutional change and the development of an innovation in education for community service. Preceding the sections on strategy and educational innovation is a brief description of significant new developments in the on-going program during the months of March and April.

I. CURRENT PROGRAM AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Current Placement of Trainees

A tally of the 120 trainees involved in the Women's Talent Corps program as of April 30, 1967, showed that 41 were placed in schools in Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx as Teacher Assistants and Guidance Assistants; 14 were placed in major municipal hospitals as Social Work Assistants, Occupational Therapy Assistants and Recreational Therapy Assistants; 14 were placed in neighborhood centers as Social Work Assistants; 6 were placed in special settings as Program Worker Assistants and Research Assistants, and 45 trainees were still undergoing the academic phase of their training at Women's Talent Corps headquarters. Working closely with them at every stage, both in the classroom and in the field, were 24 coordinator-trainers with experience in education, social work and other professional fields.

Second Group in the Field

A report on the training experience of Cycle II trainees and coordinator-trainers who began their field training in March in one of the poorest areas of New York City, is given in the Field Training Director's report, Attachment A.

Third Group of Trainees Selected

The third and final cycle of training for a group of 46 women selected from some 400 applicants began on April 4. An effort was made to recruit Spanish-speaking and lower-income women. The trainees selected were a less homogeneous group than those selected for Cycles I and II. Group III represents all the boroughs of the City of New York, and a wide range of talents and interests. Among the eight coordinator-trainers chosen were two with social work degrees and one teacher. Their ages ranged from 27 to 70.

Lectures by Experienced Trainees and Coordinators

An innovation in the orientation program for the second, and especially for the third groups, was the utilization of trainees and coordinator-trainers with field experience as planners and lecturers, in addition to experts and professionals from outside. (See Outline of Orientation Program, Attachment B.) Experienced trainees and coordinator-trainers were brought back to headquarters to describe their experiences to the group of women who would soon be following them into the field. They gave concrete examples of the kind of work they were doing and the skills needed. Principals and guidance counselors from cooperating schools were also called upon to describe the program from their point of view, explain its value to the community agency and clarify the way in which it functions. A complete review of the first two cycles of orientation, prepared by the Institute Training Director, is found in Attachment C.

Board of Education Agrees to New Positions

A major achievement during the month of April was acceptance by the Board of Education of the Women's Talent Corps proposal that permanent new positions be established within the New York City public schools for Teacher Assistants and Guidance Assistants. Months of intensive effort by the Women's Talent Corps, supported by members of its Board, by school principals and superintendents, by the United Federation of Teachers, and by petitions from the trainees themselves, had preceded this important agreement. A detailed description of the events leading up to this significant breakthrough in the campaign to persuade community agencies to establish new career positions, is given in the Women's Talent Corps Application for Extension of OEO Contract, dated April 1967.

Salary and Benefits for New Positions

Specifically, the Board of Education promised to open up the new career positions beginning in September, 1967, to be filled by low-income women with Women's Talent Corps or equivalent training. At subsequent meetings with the Board's Personnel Director, it was further agreed that approximately 80 salaried positions would be established. The beginning salary requested was $5500 for a ten-month year, with ten steps leading to a maximum salary level. It was also proposed that Teacher and Guidance Assistants have the same holidays and retirement benefits as regular teachers, but that there be no category of substitute Teacher or Guidance Assistant. The Women's Talent Corps has requested that the new positions be licensed and that a person completing a course similar to that given by the Women's Talent Corps be permitted to hold such a position.

Laying the Groundwork for Further Training in Hospitals

An effort begun in earlier months to secure greater participation by hospitals continued during March and April. An intensive program of visits and consultation with social service directors of private hospitals was undertaken with two specific objectives in mind: to arrange placements for Cycle III trainees in these hospitals, and to explain to hospital administrators the concept of "new careers" for low-income women.

Example at Bellevue

An example of the kind of new career that can be established by a hospital is provided by the position of Occupational Therapy Assistant developed at Bellevue Hospital, where three Women's Talent Corps trainees are now working in the Psychiatric Unit. The goal here is to free the professional Occupational Therapist to work only on intensive therapy, and let the pre-professional take over supportive therapy on the wards. Since occupational therapy is used as a

diagnostic tool, the trainee works with one patient at a time, trying to find an activity that will help him. Often the assistant will pick up something specific from the patient, some important fact that will help in his treatment. She can then transmit this to the doctor or to the Occupational Therapist. Through initial contact on the ward with the Occupational Therapy Assistant, a patient may ultimately be recommended for intensive therapy. Many hospitals are interested in creating similar jobs to meet urgent personnel needs, and further discussions will take place in the fall to work out specific details.

Preparing Job Descriptions

Throughout March and April trainees and coordinator-trainers, together with their agency supervisors, worked on the preparation of job descriptions. This involved writing down the essence of the job being performed at each community agency, and describing in detail the precise nature of the duties assigned to Guidance Assistants, Teacher Assistants, Recreational Therapy Assistants, etc. Learning how to prepare a job description is an integral part of the field training program itself, quite apart from its value in persuading agencies to establish new positions. This is a continuing process as a job grows and changes, and must be carried out in each new agency that joins the program. Examples of the job descriptions worked out to date are found in Attachment D.

STRATEGY OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Breaking New Ground

As of April 1967, it was clear that the Women's Talent Corps would be successful in two major areas of endeavor, and that it was breaking new ground in a third area. It had shown that even status quo institutions could, under certain conditions, be persuaded to set up new permanent positions above the entry level, and that trained neighborhood women could be hired to fill these positions. Where no positions had existed before the Women's Talent Corps came into the picture, women were now keeping grade books, keeping class and health records, checking workbooks, correcting papers, operating audio-visual equipment, giving make-up exams, working with pupils on an individual or small group basis, doing remedial work with pupils in reading and arithmetic, gathering background material for teachers, visiting parents, arranging for interesting visitors to come to class, and performing myriad other educational functions to assist teachers and free them for other duties.

Innovation in Training

At the same time, the training program offered by the Women's Talent Corps was rapidly developing into a new, innovative kind of "College for Human Services" which, if successful, would show the way toward new careers for adults in their own communities. How did these developments come about? What strategy was used by the Women's Talent Corps to bring about institutional change of this magnitude?

Founded on Two Major Premises

The Women's Talent Corps was founded in early 1965 on two major premises: 1) that mature women living in poverty areas of New York City could be trained to provide important new services to the community, regardless of their previous educational accomplishments, and 2) that community agencies (including the schools) could be persuaded to incorporate the new community service functions into their existing

job structures, creating new positions. By the spring of 1967, the Women's Talent Corps had gone a long way toward proving both these assumptions correct.

Restatement of Need

The concept behind the Women's Talent Corps grew out of the multiple social needs of our time, needs in education and needs in manpower training, needs in civil rights and needs in equal opportunity; above all it grew out of the need for a new kind of institutional flexibility that would encourage service to the community by the people of the community. Attempting to cope with these needs at the local level were government and private agencies which were unable to function effectively because of shortage of staff and, equally important, because they lacked contact with the very people they were trying to help. Given the small output of the professional schools and the limited budgets of most agencies, there was little hope that they could be staffed adequately in the near future unless some radical new way could be found to channel talent and energy available in the community itself into needed services.

Need for Career Opportunities

To create jobs in community service for neighborhood women, regardless of their educational attainments, was the task which the Women's Talent Corps set itself. It would examine carefully each function performed by community agencies and schools to determine which of these functions could be performed by persons who had not progressed through the standard educational system, but who were highly motivated and willing to learn. It would try to incorporate growth into the positions created, so that they would not turn out to be dead-end jobs, but would provide a series of steps along which women could advance with training and experience.

Need for Socially Relevant Education

Also influencing the thinking of the Executive Director of the Women's Talent Corps was growing evidence that new kinds of education must be devised which would be relevant to social needs. Although the United States educates more of its citizens than any other nation, it has not yet found the key to educating those at the lower end of the socio-economic scale. People from poverty areas and big-city ghettos are often unable to compete successfully for jobs even upon completion of the prescribed courses. Many do not even graduate. Of those who begin school at the elementary level, 19% leave before the 11th grade and 30% fail to complete high school requirements. With the need for advanced administrative and technical skills increasing all the time, the capacity of the educational system to meet the demand is decreasing. It would be necessary, then, to bring in those who "dropped out", who could not compete in school or in the labor market, and give them a new and different kind of opportunity to make a contribution to society and to earn a living.

Need for Different Training Concepts

In order to do this, educational concepts and practices would have to change radically. Emphasis would have to turn away from training for industrial and production needs to training for jobs that require service skills and attitudes, and especially the ability to work with people. What specific skills are needed? Social skills, communication skills and the ability to understand other people and their problems. Equally important, emphasis would have to turn away from training for dead-end jobs to training for career jobs which would offer an opportunity for advancement up to the professional level and perhaps beyond.

Involving Neighborhood People

As soon as the general outlines of the problem became clear, and long before there was any prospect of a federal program, the Women's Talent Corps took action, starting with the people of the communities to be served. All low-income neighborhoods in New York City were visited in a series of meetings held night after night in private homes, public schools, housing projects, wherever a soapbox was available. First, the Executive Director of the Women's Talent Corps wanted to find out what kind of program would best meet local needs and what role women pictured for themselves in alleviating these needs. It became apparent at once that there was much that had been overlooked by the planners at the top who developed the blueprints for change. These women saw the needs as they actually were. They knew that schools, hospitals, clinics and welfare agencies were providing inadequate service, and could visualize a role for themselves in improving these services. In Brooklyn, the Bronx, the Lower East Side, the Lower West Side and Harlem, at innumerable meetings, the basic problems were defined and the basic answers given in terms of a new kind of helping role for community women in the service professions. So great was the enthusiasm that the women asked for further meetings and brought their neighbors and friends. Soon everyone was asking what they could do to help make the program a reality.

Community Pressure on Political Leaders

Secondly, the Executive Director of the Women's Talent Corps wanted to enlist community support for a letter-writing campaign which would persuade political leaders that they should back this program and help it obtain financial support. The women responded enthusiastically and a flood of letters soon went out to political leaders who were involved in making decisions concerning anti-poverty training programs. Community

pressure continued over a period of many months, at one point even involving a sit-in at the New York City Poverty Office, and was undoubtedly an important factor in eventually getting the program funded.

Involving Civic, Religious and Academic Groups

Also helping to secure political support at an early stage were civic, religious and academic groups, as well as individual citizens who were highly respected and had a powerful voice in the community. Slowly but surely in the course of some 300 individual visits these groups were told about the program and persuaded that training for community service was the next step that should be taken to advance the anti-poverty movement. Some wrote letters in support of this idea, and others simply lent their names to the effort. One organization, the Field Foundation, contributed funds in the form of a small grant to cover organizing expenses. This remarkable foundation has since described its grant as "one of the smallest we ever gave, and one of the best." The Dean of the School of Social Work at a major university became a charter member of the Women's Talent Corps Board of Directors, and accompanied the organizers when they presented their proposal to the New York City Council Against Poverty. Among religious organizations, the Protestant Federation was unique in supporting the Women's Talent Corps idea from the very beginning. Strong resistance was at first put up by other religious denominations, reluctant to try anything new.

Involving the Political Leadership

The most crucial group which had to be persuaded of the validity of the Women's Talent Corps idea was the political and administrative leadership of the City of New York, and its advisory council on poverty programs. In order to get the program funded directly by the federal government in Washington, which was the plan adopted by the organizers,

it was necessary to have the "concurrence" of city officials, specifically the Council Against Poverty -- which at that time had 40 members, only one of whom could be said to represent the poor. Even after the staff director of the Council was won over, and agreed to press for concurrence by the Council at large, the Council did not concur and some 70 copies of the project proposal presented for distribution to the Council mysteriously disappeared, and were never found again!

Concurrence in New York and Approval in Washington

Nevertheless, the concurrence of the City was finally obtained, thanks largely to a change of Mayor which resulted in a new attitude toward innovation and institutional change. Mayor John Lindsay, a few months after his inauguration, wrote to say that he thought the proposal had real possibilities, and asked what he could do to help promote it. This was enough to ensure prompt city and regional action, and the proposal was sent to Washington with the City's blessings. After undergoing some nine different reviewing procedures, one of which involved a drastic cut in the size of the budget, the proposal came to Sargent Shriver's desk and was signed -- but here again heavy last minute efforts by the Executive Director saved the day.

Involving Community Service Agencies

All during the time when the battle for funds was being fought, the various community agencies and schools which were to benefit from the program were also being contacted and progressively drawn into the planning. The Executive Director and staff of the Women's Talent Corps undertook an intensive and continuing program of visits to schools, hospitals, and neighborhood houses to explain to potential employers of Women's Talent Corps trainees the purpose of the program and the value it would have for them. They had to be convinced that, not only was there room for a new kind of "helping person", but that the position thus created

should involve the performance of semi-professional and even professional tasks by persons without a college degree. The job as conceived by the Women's Talent Corps would involve functions above the entry level, ensuring that meaningful careers would become available to those who proved their worth. Many agencies began to see exciting possibilities in the Women's Talent Corps program, and agreed to participate in the training process even where no immediate commitment could be made to establish permanent jobs.

Involving the Unions and Professional Groups

A final group of organizations which was brought into the picture shortly after operations began were unions and professional groups in social work and education. The most striking example of effective union cooperation was the case of the United Federation of Teachers. As the trainees moved into the schools for practical training, it became clear that union support would be needed to establish permanent positions. The Women's Talent Corps decided not to enlist the support of the entry-level unions to which school aides belonged, but rather of the professional union that represented the teachers themselves. After a series of meetings, including one in which the Women's Talent Corps program was subject to the critical scrutiny of the UFT Board, it was agreed that this union, representing 45,000 teachers, would not only support the establishment of new positions in the schools as proposed by the Women's Talent Corps, but would join the Women's Talent Corps in presenting a resolution to this effect to the Board of Education. This was the first time a major professional union had worked closely and successfully with an anti-poverty program to achieve a common goal -- a new pedagogical position to improve education and bring the community and schools closer together.

Overcoming Seats of Resistance

As all of these groups and forces worked together toward a common goal, each of them came to perceive more and more clearly the ways in which the Women's Talent Corps program would help them reach their <u>own</u> goal, whether it was better service to the public, a bridge to the community, a reduction in discrimination, a new method of educating the culturally deprived, or a revolution in the social sciences. The combination of individual and joint effort strengthened the campaign immeasurably. While opposition was not overcome all at once, and entrenched areas of resistance remain to this day, the Women's Talent Corps experience shows that opposition can be by-passed if sufficient pressure is mobilized outside the seats of resistance, however powerful they may be. When the common effort coalesces into one major push in the same direction, a breakthrough can be achieved. This is what happened in the successful campaign to secure funds for the Women's Talent Corps and this is what happened in the schools where new positions for teacher and guidance assistants were finally established.

Supporting Creative Leadership

In working with schools, community agencies and unions, it was essential also to identify and support creative leadership where it already existed, as well as to develop a joint strategy for promoting new ideas and innovations. One of the most valuable functions which an independent outside agency such as the Women's Talent Corps can perform is to help established institutions to achieve their own highest goals by encouraging internal leadership in its efforts to introduce change from within. The Women's Talent Corps helped agency leaders perceive more clearly the significance of their role within the broader picture of institutional reform,

a significance often lost sight of under the pressure of day to day activities.

New Ideas in Action

As in all strategy, timing is important. There is no doubt that the Women's Talent Corps began before the time was ripe for many of the changes pioneered by the organization. Slowly the climate has been changing. In New York City there is a new administration, which encouraged movement away from the status quo toward acceptance of change. New ideas were developed by the Women's Talent Corps in education or the anti-poverty drive and, as the country moves to an acceptance of job training and career development in the human services for adults, the Institute has been there to help develop it further and push for its realization as the resistance slowly is overcome. Because the Women's Talent Corps was established before acceptance was developed, it has been able through its actual experience to provide concrete examples of how it might work. Now that "new careers" training is being recognized as a key to long-term gains in the anti-poverty drive, the Women's Talent Corps is called upon frequently to submit testimony before Congress and to advise other programs in other cities on techniques for training and permanent, meaningful employment as well as to give training and assistance to other groups in New York City.

Women's Talent Corps Firsts

As a result of its rapid organization and strategic timing, the Women's Talent Corps became

* the first "new careers" training institute for community service positions in this country,

* the first institute to educate women for positions that did not exist at the time the program was formulated,

* the first to open up careers for women at the poverty level in income,

* the first to persuade professional unions to recognize and support pre-professional career lines,

* the first to use the development of job descriptions as both a training technique and a means of persuading community agencies to establish new jobs,

* the first to train for careers rather than dead-end jobs,

* the first to develop an inter-related academic and field training course the equivalent of an academic year,

* the first to take instruction into the field and relate it to the new positions in the helping professions,

* the first to train faculty with students to achieve integrated education and deep understanding and commitment from both the professional instructor and the low-income trainee.

III AN INNOVATION IN EDUCATION

Unique Methods of Training

Concepts of education are changing under the impact of the times. New ideas are being tried out and new experimental programs established in many parts of the country. The Women's Talent Corps is part of this experimentation. It is challenging basic assumptions concerning the capabilities of uneducated citizens. It is developing unique new methods of training people not only to perform tasks now performed by professionals, but to perform them in a new manner and spirit which, it is hoped, will change the quality of human relations in the helping professions. The success of this effort depends first on the kind of person selected, and secondly on the training process itself.

Special Tests Used in Screening

No standard tests were available to measure the qualities sought by the Women's Talent Corps in those it enrolled. Special tests and interview methods were therefore devised to reveal such qualities as ability to work with people, ability to recognize community problems and suggest practical steps toward their solution, and ability to show sympathy toward others and inspire constructive attitudes. Those selected are given standardized reading and aptitude tests at some time during the course of their 30-week training program, but these tests are not used to eliminate candidates. Rather, they provide evidence of the need for remedial work in elementary skills, assistance to the staff in counseling, and a solid foundation for research. Performance on tests ranges from low-average to high-average, but this ranking does not seem to be the decisive factor in performance in the field. Qualities such as perception of social problems, sensitivity to human relations,

and high morale are more closely correlated with success. In sum, the Women's Talent Corps finds that level of academic achievement is not as important a factor in success on the job as ability to work effectively with other people.

Assumptions Concerning the Culture of Poverty

The training program reflects a basic philosophy about the "teachability" of uneducated people. It assumes that the "culture of poverty" does not affect the attitudes of most of the low-income groups in New York City, and specifically not of women enrolled in the Women's Talent Corps program. Rather, the Women's Talent Corps trainees subscribe to the basic cultural values of the U.S. and strive for the same goals as other Americans. It assumes that these women are ready and able to become the "new careerists" of the future. What they need is help in developing and focussing their latent talents, rather than major restructuring of their attitudes toward society. Because certain behavior is expected, it is received.

Atmosphere of Professionalism Fostered

Women participating in the Women's Talent Corps program are treated from the start like colleagues involved in an exciting social experiment rather than like typical students. The atmosphere of professionalism which pervades every activity generates enthusiasm and strengthens motivation. Instructors know the importance of fostering this atmosphere and contribute to it by their own attitudes. In their relationship with the trainees, they stress their common dedication to institutional change and social reform. The fact that they are willing to use their years of education and experience to help improve the community is eloquent testimony of good faith. Their role is to help each trainee find out what she has to contribute

to the joint effort, and to acquire the skill and confidence needed to use her talent effectively, whether she is teaching retarded children, helping former mental patients find a place to live, or providing recreation for children in the hospital. Each instructor works intensively with a small group of trainees (between five and nine) both in the classroom and in the field. The result is a close personal relationship of the kind that supports morale and encourages emulation. A small ratio between faculty and students is essential for full realization of the career and educational plan.

New Careers College

Integration of Classroom and Field Experience

As a result of its special philosophy and experimental methods of teaching the underprivileged, the Women's Talent Corps is rapidly developing into a "new careers" College for Human Services. The college would be built on the foundation established by the training institute, but would modify the existing curriculum on the basis of experience, and would add a second year for those women who qualified. As at present, the service concept of education would be fundamental and a desire to serve the community would be a basic criteria for enrollment. Integration of classroom experience with work in the field, each reinforcing and enriching the other, would continue to be a basic technique, with instructors first learning their new role in the classroom with the trainee and then being placed in community agencies along with those they were training. Continued emphasis would be put on eliminating the distinction between academic and field training. This process is visualized as a circular one, with each kind of training experience merging into the other. The interweaving of formal classes with field experience, a continual

process, results in a synthesis of ideas with practice which enriches both, reinforcing learning.

Two-Year Program

As at present, the classroom program would stress skills and concepts, as well as selected material from the social sciences related to community service. During the second year, students who had completed high school would be given an opportunity to study in greater depth certain aspects of education, psychology, social work, guidance, etc., which they found they needed in the field. The full two-year program would lead to an Associate of Arts degree and might be articulated with courses given by regular four-year institutions.

New Careers Association

Another step being taken by the Women's Talent Corps to give permanency to the new job functions performed by the trainees is the establishment of a professional association, which may be called the Talent Corps Association. The role of this organization will be to represent all those embarked on new careers in community service, to set standards, advance their interests and help them continue to grow and develop. This may well become the accrediting body which will determine the level of performance and accomplishment which must be met to qualify for community service jobs at a pre-professional level. With this step, the new careers movement will have attained an important objective and another major goal will have been achieved.

ATTACHMENTS

A. REPORT OF FIELD TRAINING DIRECTOR, MARCH 1967

B. ORIENTATION PROGRAM FOR COORDINATORS AND TRAINEES, CYCLE III

C. REPORT ON ORIENTATION PROGRAM BY INSTITUTE TRAINING DIRECTOR, APRIL 15, 1967

D. JOB DESCRIPTIONS OF TRAINED ASSISTANTS, MAY 1, 1967

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